



Historical Society News

APRIL 2010

The Railroads of Hightstown

by John Kilbride

Author's note: The following narrative has been adapted from a lecture on the same subject and gleaned from several sources within the author's library. It will provide a selected glimpse into the history and heritage of Hightstown's railroads. Students desiring a more complete chronicle are encouraged to contact the author for a listing of recommended readings. Note the plural use of railroads in the title of the article, for throughout their respective corporate lives, the names changed! Thus, the various railroads appear in boldfaced print below.

Today's View

A single abutment welcoming travelers into Hightstown is all that visually remains from the railroad right-of-way swath originally created in 1832. To a trained eye, it is possible to visualize the line as it bridged both Main and Stockton Streets, the waterway in between and the multitude of railroad crossings within Hightstown. 150 years after the first train arrived in town, the line was abandoned and tracks removed, providing only distant memories to long-time residents. In between creation of an 1832 station stop alongside the third railroad built in the United States, to the current status of not appearing on any U.S. railroad maps, Hightstown can easily trace its growth to the railroad's development and an ability to transport produce from the region's agricultural lands to distant markets. (Some of this heritage appears on the walls of the refurbished freight station!) Together with the ease of shipping produce and farming supplies via Hightstown, passengers were provided a passing glance into the area's development and its location midway between the two growing metropolis cities of New York and Philadelphia. Only the nation's growing fondness for, and reliance on, the ease and convenience of highways and aviation prompted the decline of the rail line.

The Camden & Amboy Line

Beginning with the Camden & Amboy Railroad, two rail lines would serve Hightstown. The C&A began with a charter to build a railroad 'between the Rivers Raritan and Delaware.' The charter was awarded to Col. John Stevens in February of 1830. Colonel Stevens, an early proponent of steam power, picked Bordentown from which to start northward (this south terminal was "protected" with his steamboat service to Philadelphia, and would be reviewed later.) The charter included the monopolistic criteria of exclusive domain of the New York-Philadelphia corridor, with the railroad to pay a state tax on passengers and goods carried. Any violation would void the charter. Later that year, Stevens sent his

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April

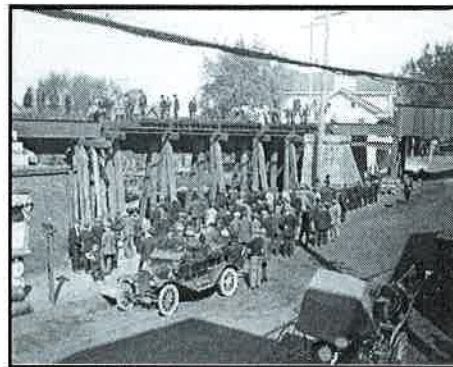
- 25 Program, 3:00 p.m. at Society Headquarters, "Disasters in Hightstown: Fires, Floods and Snowstorms for the Record Books", presented by Richard Hutchinson.

May

- 21 Movie night at the firehouse

October

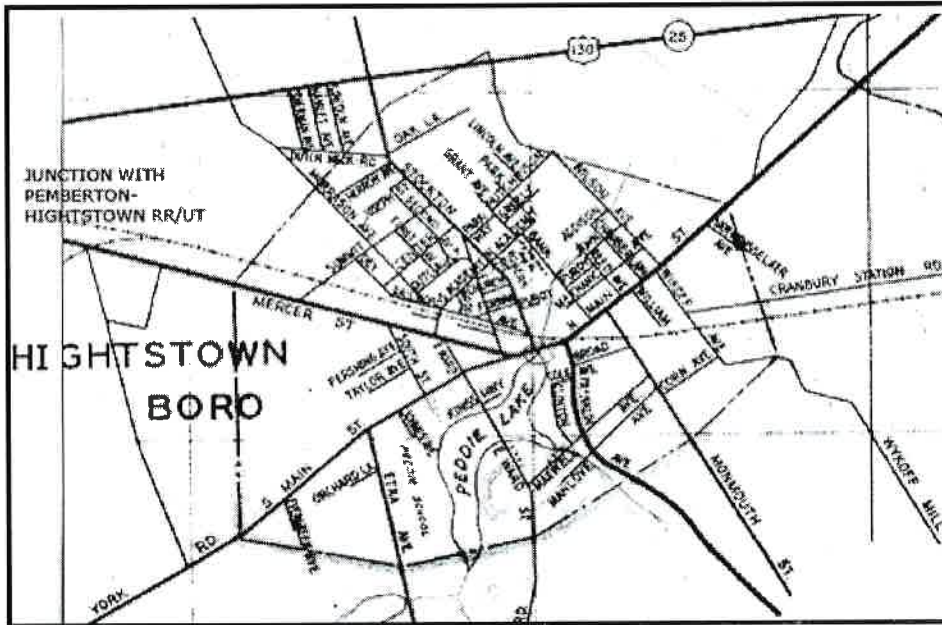
- 16 Hightstown Fire Company's 175th Anniversary Celebration
17 Historical Society House Tour



The railroad abutment still standing in Hightstown shows in the center-right portion of the picture. The picture was taken in 1914 when the Main Street Bridge at the intersection of Main and Franklin Streets was replaced. North of the abutment is a white building where the firehouse now stands. Source: Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

Hightstown Railroads ,continued from page 1

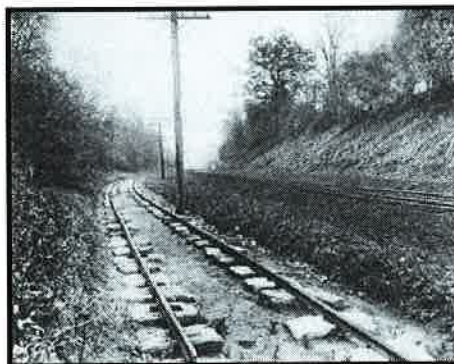
son Robert to England for rail and a locomotive. By years' end, to satisfy his critics, grading for the line began. The route was surveyed to follow the Bordentown Turnpike through Hightstown, an early stagecoach route through central New Jersey. The rail route was designed to act as a connection between the two rivers, with steamboat services operated by Steven's companies at each end. (Before the rail route was completed, passengers would transfer to a stagecoach between the waterways, a trip of 4-5 days that depended on weather conditions en route!)



The C&A route through Hightstown followed Mercer Street (left to right), passed over Stockton Street and Peddie Lake/Rocky Brook and northward to Cranbury Station. The junction with the Pemberton-Hightstown Railroad (later Union Transportation) is shown at upper left. Source: Wikipedia; section of "Camden-Amboy Map, 1869," at www.wikipedia.com on 2.26.10.

The "T" rail began to arrive from Wales in August, 1831 (22 of 23 shiploads arriving safely!). Some sources tell of the existing rail - mere strips of iron affixed to wooden timbers - being replaced by the new stock, the actual mileage of the temporary measure not reported. Both were laid atop stone "sleepers", stone blocks of several compositions and supplied via contract with Sing-Sing prison. A width (gauge) of four foot, ten inches was used. By October of 1832, construction had reached Hightstown and passenger service begun with teams of horses pulling stagecoach-type carriages, service being extended as trackwork extended northward. By December, South Amboy was reached, completing a connection to the Stevens steamboats to New York City. (Lore tells us the "sleepers" became scarce and that lumber was used to complete the last few miles, so as to insure through service before the onset

of winter.) Three changes of horse teams were required en route. On January 24, 1833, the tracks of the Camden & Amboy saw the first load of freight arrive in the country village of Hightstown.



Stone sleepers used by the Camden and Amboy Railroad. Source: www.americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/img/media/l/1381.jpg on 2.27.10.

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HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971

To educate, while preserving for future generations, our people and our community's history.

Editor, Shirley Olsen

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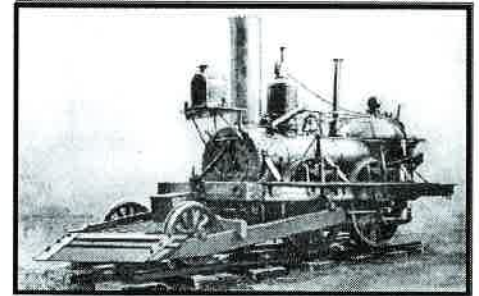
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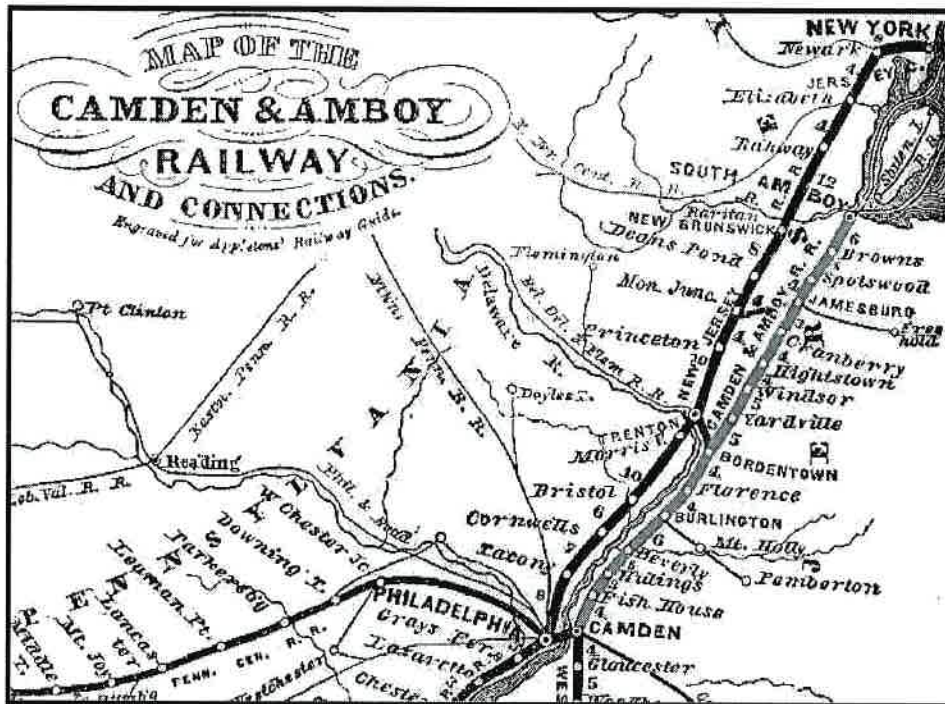
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The "John Bull" locomotive had arrived on a Bordentown wharf from England in June 1832, in several crates and without assembly instructions! By October 1833, the "Bull" was able to make its first trip; it promptly derailed after hitting a hog. A "cow catcher" and pilot trucks were then added to aid in its continued use. Until other engines were received (at least three others came from England), some trains were still horse-powered. Meanwhile, the route's construction continued south from Bordentown to Camden and was completed in 1834. This segment was meant to be temporary - winter use only - as a steam-powered version, between the end points. In the first year, 100,000 passengers rode the line; six trains per day appeared on the schedule. After five years, the figure reached 165,000.



The John Bull Locomotive, now housed in the Smithsonian Museum. Source: "The Early Railroads" from New Jersey as a Colony and a State by Francis Bazley Lee, 1902, copied from www.catskillarchive.com/rrextra/abnjrr.html on 2.26.10.



The north-south line to the right is the Camden and Amboy Railroad. The parallel line to the left is the New Jersey Railroad, built less than a decade after the Camden and Amboy Railroad. Source: www.delrivgreenway.org/.../Camden_AmboyRR.html on 2.26.10.

By 1838, now anxious (and, perhaps, pressured by Trenton politicians!) to serve the state's capital city, a line was constructed from Bordentown northward along the Delaware River/Delaware & Raritan Canal to Trenton. Completed in the same year, it was then extended along the canal bank towards New Brunswick and a connection to the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company (later to become a C&A property), creating a through, all-weather connection to/from the New York City harborside terminal in Jersey City. Thus, after only six years, the original line through Hightstown lost its prestige as the main line and would revert to a secondary "branch" line status, of significant importance only to local travelers and shippers alike. (That through route was connected to the company's Philadelphia & Trenton (P&T) line, acquired in 1836 as protection for their monopoly status.)

A final construction effort, prompted by inefficiencies realized by the handling of Civil War traffic, occurred in 1862. The Trenton-New Brunswick segment was both realigned to the present-day (Amtrak) Northeast Corridor alignment and the entire line "standard gauged" (to 4 foot-8-1/2 inches.) That construction also prompted the creation of the Princeton Branch.

Curiously, a majority of through passengers continued to ride C&A trains via Bordentown and Camden until 1867, when a final rail link into downtown Philadelphia was finished. (the existing P&T terminal was located in the then-distant section of Kensington.)

In 1871, the Camden & Amboy holdings, by then some 23 different properties, was leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad for 999 years. The PRR was merged into Penn Central in 1968 and Conrail was created in 1976.

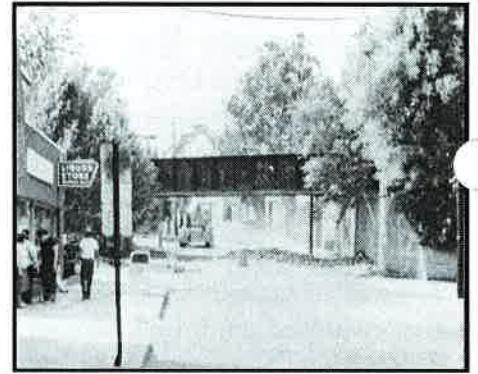
The last physical change to the original C&A route occurred in 1965 when rails were removed between

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Hightstown and Windsor, severing the line forever as a through route. In 1984, with remaining trackside industries turning to trucks for the handling of their supplies and products, the tracks through downtown Hightstown were removed further northward (prompting the discovery of long-buried "sleepers") and Cranbury became the present-day end-of-track.

Scheduled passenger service through Hightstown, between Camden and South Amboy and initiated upon completion of the line in 1832, ended in 1938; only a special World's Fair train in 1939 and troop trains from Fort Dix during WW II followed. All passenger service ended in 1963; in March 2004, the south end saw the re-start of passenger service with RiverLINE operations between Trenton and Camden.



A 1984 photo of the railroad bridge over Stockton Street looking westward toward Route 130 when the bridge was removed.

Hightstown Rebuilds

by Richard S. Hutchinson

The walkway across the waterfall in downtown Hightstown was removed last year for safety reasons. Mayor Bob Patten has recently formed a committee to study the rebuilding of the walkway. Since several organizations will be involved in the bridge replacement, it seemed appropriate to include Richard Hutchinson's history of the walkway and Memorial Park in this newsletter.

The Gross Brother's Feed Mill and the other mills were located at the intersection of Franklin Street and North Main Street and were the first thing that you saw when you came into town from the east and the north. They sat right down to the edge of the sidewalks of each street. In that period of time, the dam which formed Peddie Lake was covered by the mill structures and a walk-way went across the dam in the enclosed structure. The visible portion of the dam, which was made of wood and controlled the water flow at the site, could only be seen from the street in front of the mill buildings. There was no retaining wall, as we now know it today, around the lake or along the sidewalk. Main Street was still unpaved as were most of the town's streets. It was 1920. On the right side of the dam when facing the pond stood the old saw mill and then building after building filled the area from Main Street to the lake and running from the mill buildings up to Stockton Street. Here, every type of business could be found. Among the many little wooden buildings, shacks and garages could be

found such businesses as a movie theater, garage, blacksmith shop, barber shop, etc. But all that changed in 1920 when a fire began in the mills. The mill dust spread the fire through the mill structures and the entire mill area was destroyed including all of the wooden buildings from Franklin Street on the east side of Main Street up to the Railroad Hotel at Stockton Street. The town had been in serious danger of being destroyed by this fire.

After the 1920 mill fire, the massive cleanup began immediately. Spurring on the cleanup even further was the fact that Hightstown's Bicentennial Celebration was in 1921 and it was rapidly approaching. The owners of the mill property decided not to rebuild the mills, the property was bought up by a group of local businessmen and the property was deeded to the town. Thus, the town acquired the property almost up to Stockton Street and this began the rebuilding of Hightstown. Main street was paved and sidewalks were put in. A huge flag pole for what was later to become the site of the opening

ceremonies of the Bicentennial was set into place in what would later become known as Memorial Park. Completing the renewal of the mill area was the removal of the wooden dam and the retaining walls which were replaced with the present rock wall and dam that we see today. This project was completed in 1923.

All of the above rebuilding was done through a community effort guided by the efforts of the businessmen involved in the Hightstown Board of Trade. This whole project was to cost an estimated \$25,000 and all of it had to be raised by contributions. The "drive" for these funds lasted all of three weeks with the entire amount was raised in that period of time!! Through this effort of the people of our community, Hightstown's downtown area was rebuilt.

On the next page is the letter sent to every household in Hightstown:

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Hightstown Rebuilds

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Board of Trade
Hightstown, New Jersey

Dear Friend:

In the belief that you still have a "warm spot in your heart" for Hightstown and confident that you, like any other patriotic American, want to see honor done to the "boys" who served in the World War, the Hightstown Board of Trade begs your thoughtful consideration of the following proposition:

Something over a year ago a small group of generous and public-spirited Hightstown men paid \$30,000 for the land formerly occupied by the flour mills at the outlet of Peddie Lake, and then donated that land to the Borough of Hightstown as a site for a Memorial Park. This land fronts 125 feet on Main Street and 323 feet on Franklin Street. A plan of a lot and the proposed park development is enclosed. Look it over and you will surely agree with us that it is a beautiful site for such a purpose.

Now we are undertaking to raise funds to fit up this Park in a way that will make it a permanent and fitting Memorial to the World War soldiers of Hightstown and vicinity. This means a new concrete dam, faced with Princeton stone, a retaining wall of the same materials along the shore of the lake, walks, trees and shrubbery, with grading of the whole plot. On this plot will then be placed a huge boulder, inset in which will be a large bronze tablet inscribed with names of our World War heroes.

The estimated cost of the whole enterprise is \$25,000, and every man, woman and child of our community will be urged to make some contribution to the fund. A certificate will be issued to each subscriber. Pledge buttons, window cards, with small American flag stickers for each member of the family contributing, will also be furnished. Pledges may, if desired, be paid in four equal installments, due July 1 and October 1, 1923, and January 1 and April 1, 1924 respectively.

The important and personal question now is, will you join us in the enterprise and have a share in doing honor to the soldier boys of your old home town? Fill out the enclosed pledge blank for all you can do, "sign on the dotted line", and mail at once to the Treasurer, E.B. Chamberlin, Hightstown, N.J., to whose order all remittances should be made.

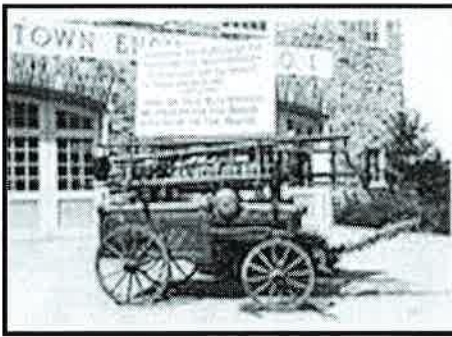
The "drive" begins Tuesday, March 20, and ends Thursday, April 5th, with the big rally Board of Trade dinner in the Peddie dining-room. Please let us have your pledge before the closing date.

Yours for the good of Hightstown and the glory of her sons. [Signed] C. Herbert Davison, Pres.; Wm. H. Franklin, Sec.

Editor's Note: I often wonder that if such a disaster befell the community today, would we have that same community spirit? Would we be able to pull together and accomplish what our forefathers did?

Hightstown Engine Company No. #1 Celebrates 175 Years

On Saturday, October 16, 2010, the Fire Department will be putting on a parade, as it did for the Company's 150th anniversary. Fire companies from across New Jersey, and some from Pennsylvania, will be competing against each other in marching and various equipment demonstrations. Bagpipe and high school bands as well as trailer-drawn floats will be a part of the parade that Saturday morning. A Movie Night is planned at the firehouse on May 21, featuring old footage and pictures documenting the history of the fire company. The public is invited.



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Society House Tour

A committee has been formed to plan the Society House Tour set for Sunday, October 17, 2010, from 1-5 p.m. So far, the committee, under the leadership of Shirley Olsen, has six homes participating in the tour including the Smith House and 208 Stockton Street, both homes in the historic district. We still need two more homes to be on tour and we need volunteers to host the event. If you are interested in helping out, please give Shirley a call. Please note that the Society's tour will be the same weekend as the Engine Company Anniversary.



Photo of Jim and Darlene Keller's home on 4 Drew Lane, East Windsor.

This house is historically known as the "Forman House". The house survived by being included within the housing subdivision of the farm associated with this house. This subdivision was a later addition to the Brooktree area. The house dates to approximately the same time as the house currently owned by the Lee family—roughly the period of 1750-1800. Information obtained from Clark Hutchinson.

Interesting Article

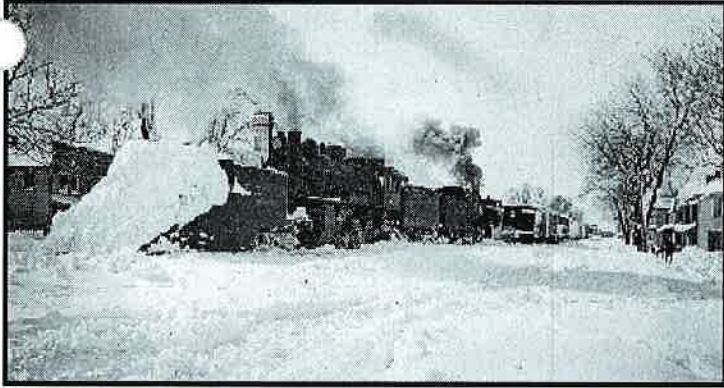
If you're interested in seventeenth century New Jersey, you'll be fascinated by Bob Craig's recent article, "Benjamin Clarke Sr. and His Diary of the Early Raritan Valley," published in the /Princeton University Library Chronicle/, Volume LXVI, Number 3, Spring 2005, pages 393-438; despite the imprint date, it was issued in November 2009.

Bob has uncovered an impressive amount of detail about Benjamin Clarke, utilizing a wide array of resources that might not all be familiar to many New Jersey researchers. This is particularly impressive given the fact that Clarke was not a terribly prominent man. Bob weaves the narrative in a riveting and compelling way, and conveys a great deal about the social history and day-to-day life in seventeenth century New Jersey that we might not have obtained through other sources. His analysis and interpretation of many of the diary entries provides a rich context that allows us to appreciate the import of Clarke's entries.

I found it riveting, and when finished reading the article, wished that it would someday be expanded. I'm sure that Bob had to leave a great many things out to limit the length, and I suspect that those details would be equally exciting and thought-provoking to researchers interested in life in early New Jersey.

Judi Watson

Special Program -- April 25th



The public is invited to attend a special program, titled "Disasters in Hightstown: Fires, Floods, and Snowstorms for the Record Books" at the Society freight station on Sunday, April 25 at 3 p.m. Richard Hutchinson, member of Society, and past editor of "Historical Society News", will be using an over-head projector during his talk on some of the natural disasters as well as some of the man-made incidents, that have befallen Hightstown in the past. These incidents will cover the period from the late 1700's to the 1950's. Hutch will be using some of the historical images from the Society collection as well as his own personal collection.



The Society needs volunteers to help with all our accessions from the John Orr and other local families. The Orr family has given the Society boxes of John's historical manuscripts that need to be registered and filed. Please give Julie Ely a call, if you can contribute some time to these tasks.

The Hightstown Woman's Club has agreed to start taking oral histories from our long time residents of Hightstown. If you have a history you would like to share, please call Shirley Olsen.

Society Acquisition

The Society is happy to report we have some new displays in the train station foyer cabinets. Robert Szychowski, our treasurer, has placed some cars, truck wagon, a cow, and a horse pull German toy stuffed with excelsior and actual horsehair tail and mane. Robert also has exhibited an assortment of banks of figural cast iron. The Hall's Excelsior believed to be the first mechanical bank, patented in 1860's, is the building with a square cupola on top. When it is lifted, a little monkey, the cashier, is sitting at a desk. When you put the coin on the monkey's desk, the cupola closes and it is deposited into the bank. These were ways to teach children to save. He also has some paper mache Belsnickels candy containers and Christmas bottle brush trees.

Visit our website at www.hewhs.org



Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- Individual (\$20) Family (\$25) Booster/Patron (\$40)
- Sustaining (\$50) Life (individual) (\$20) Life (married) (\$275)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Please mail the completed application, along with a check made payable to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society to:

2010 DUES ARE DUE
You will not receive a bill

Membership Committee
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

Celebrating 50 Years of Service (and Spring!)

The Rocky Brook Garden Club just celebrated 50 years of service to the Hightstown-East Windsor and Cranbury areas. As part of the anniversary, two crape myrtle trees were purchased, one for the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society garden and one for the Heritage Park in Cranbury. On March 24th Dale Grubb and Shirley Olsen planted some spring flowers near the new crape myrtle tree on the Society property.

The Club will be sponsoring a summer garden tour titled "June in Bloom" on Saturday, June 12th from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tickets will be sold at Ely House for \$15. The Club will again be designing the floral arrangements for the Society's historical house tour set for Sunday, October 17, 2010.



Dale Grubb (l) and Shirley Olsen (r) planting flowers on the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society property.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Craig
4002 Nottingham Way
Hamilton Square NJ 08690

Hights
Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, New Jersey 08520

